

SITUATING OUR EXPERIENCES

A proposal for doctoral research as a network of practices

CCC PhD-Forum

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We are participants of the CCC PhD-Forum* with various educational backgrounds —curatorial studies, visual arts, literature, psychology, music, philosophy, gender studies, cultural studies, design theory. We bring to the PhD-Forum a set of cultural formations, practices, intellectual geographies and research interests departing from different languages. We are artists, researchers, curators, educators as well as doctoral students, PhD-applicants, assistants and professors in the humanities, social sciences, philosophy, design, architecture and contemporary art. Each of us is working individually on a research project before, during and after the PhD. These temporalities encounter one another when we meet. We are here to situate our experiences in the context of the current debates on doctoral research within the art academy. The PhD-Forum is for us, the CCC Research Affiliates, a place where we embody our research processes and create the conditions for a dialogue between our multiple backgrounds to take place. This condition emerges from the various voices, problems and projects of its participants.

We gather within the format of the Forum, situated within an institutional framework, while each of our research projects are affiliated differently. Some of the Research Affiliates embarked already on a PhD-project with a university elsewhere, some are preparing a PhD-application, and some are following an independent research path. Situating our individual experiences within a shared format also means to shape the continuous transformation of a group of researchers.

We have in common the concern for practice-based research; hence, our individual experiences form a research-community. At the same time, we exchange and transform our perspectives; thus, these shared experiences form a collective subject. There is continuous oscillation between these various zones of experiences from within to outside, and back again. This swinging to and from engenders a network of practices instituting

consequences with transformative potential. The network of practices shifts temporalities, crafts methodologies, and articulates entanglements; it builds specific archives and develops operational concepts; it can only operate when it allows differences to take place granting space for new languages and the emergence of unfamiliar vocabularies; it enables plasticity as a formatting process; it invites collective imaginaries to arrive, inhabits contingencies, and understands experiences as working material.

The PhD-Forum offers us the possibility to exit from the logic of productivity and immediate profit, and to enter in a process of sharing and thinking together with long-term consequences. Against the scattered multitude of intellectual producers in cognitive capitalism we are here with the desire to form an assembly and in so doing re-territorialize research.

1

What do we mean by doctoral research as a network of practices?

2

A practice-based research resists one single normative concept of time. It occupies, practices, embodies and lives through different time-zones, time-languages and time-bodies. It takes place while walking on sand-mines in Zambales in the Philippines, while listening to tapes from Rivolta Femminile's audio archives, while connecting a philosophy of spatiality with making an exhibition, while travelling from Geneva to Bahia, while speaking about the micropolitics of memory and mental health in Uruguay...

Such an approach to research-time operates chrono-politically —i.e. research-time takes place through the unfolding of different temporalities: institutional time, deadline time, search time, reading time, writing time, wasted time, time of fear, body time, thinking time, time of struggle, joyful time, collective time, transformative time... Research-time is precious as well as vulnerable. What if we approach vulnerability as constitutive for doing research by practice? That means, by understanding the feeling of being vulnerable while trying to define a practice-based methodology not as a symptom of incapacity to master but as a capacity to be affected ... that means, to be capable to expose oneself to that which matters beyond academic reasoning.¹ Research-time contradicts the chrono-normative order that the Bologna Declaration, regulating Higher Education in Europe since 1999, continuously imposes under the name of ECTS-points, evaluation reports, deadlines, and peer-reviewed procedures. Thus, a practice-based research challenges and questions the implantation of chrononormativity, as Elizabeth Freeman denounces, which individualizes the researcher by extracting the body toward maximum productivity.² Being in the politics of

time means being affected, troubled and excited as constitutive of a shared research process in practice. In other words, doctoral research as a network of practices generates common time, where research is carried out in a community, not in solitude. This is a political motivation: to get out of the *entre-soi* and the simple reproduction of knowledge. Doctoral research as a network of practices is opposed to the consumption of time in the current 'economy of attention'. Doing research in practice produces its own temporality and ultimately generates time instead of consuming it.

3

How, we wonder, is research as practice written through and in different temporalities?

4

Research by the means of art in a practice-based PhD-process needs space to build the conditions for methodologies to emerge. The PhD-Forum uses collective exchange as a form of methodology. This is a long term process, in which we build the conditions of a collective space, where trust, intimacy, listening and care are required. An environment for facilitating doctoral research as a network of practices approaches the making, reading and writing as political modes of address and mediation. The political resides in a practice that engages with methods from various disciplines, however, not simply by copy/pasting them but by asking: What can a method do *for* us and *to* us? How does it resonate with our specific practices or questions? How does it matter for a lived experience? Is a lived experience a method in its own right? Am I a method? How can we propose a science in the making? From where we write in Switzerland, at this moment, these questions profoundly challenge the institutional normativity of framing doctoral research by the means of art.

5

Research by the means of art in a practice-based PhD-process must invest in finding methodologies to articulate different entangled arenas. We draw on the productive double meaning at articulation. The first being to express, to language, to articulate. How, we ask, do we deal with a necessity to speak forth as intellectuals, as people? How, as Audre Lorde asks, can we reclaim language and find the words that we do not have?³ Secondly, we understand the potential of articulation to link different fields, ideologies and concrete situations. Articulation is for us a deeply political methodology, enabling fragments of different research come together and to situate us - intellectually and politically, within a larger horizon? Following cultural theorist Stuart Hall, we understand these methodologies of articulation as

possible “form[s] of a connection that can make a unity of two different elements under certain conditions”.⁴ We continually strive to consider what are the “certain conditions” —structural, institutional and cultural, that shape and inflect our research and that allow such linkages to occur?

6

How does doctoral research as a network of practices allow *difference* — methodological, epistemological cultural, and historical— to take place, not strategically but structurally?

7

Doctoral research as a network of practices reintroduces the complexities of knowing and not-knowing. Not taking for granted what we know and questioning the conditions of how knowledge comes into being, how languages and bodies are intertwined, is constitutive of research as practice, and practice as research. We are exposed to other ways of thinking, bringing concepts into practice, raising concerns, producing and enunciating knowledges and uncovering vulnerabilities. These defamiliar encounters reveal how each research process is brought about within particular conditions of knowledge production. It matters where we are coming from and how this frame of reference shapes our worldviews. We carry a set of conditions that resonates with the object of our inquiry. But where and what are our blind spots? What are our anxieties? How may anxiety become productive? Doctoral research as a network of practices involves reflecting on one’s own fragilities and finding words and concepts to share them. The attempt to build a conversation with different arenas of thought, practices and languages requires multiple translations. It demands exploring other languages and vocabularies, as well as developing common words and forms of expression. Confronting the limits of axiomatic discourse and transgressing them is essential in order to pave the way for alternative reasoning, and in turn new methodologies.

8

Research by the means of art puts pressure on institutionalized models of knowing. It critically examines a relation of political order and social organization to knowledge production, transmission and education policies. Catherine Malabou asks “can we not envision, in spite of everything, a plasticity of social condition and recover the wealth of variations and deviations of structure at the heart of culture?”⁵ In difference to the neoliberal imperative of flexibility in life-long learning, we call for plasticity, that means, for the continuity of a process to reshape knowledge for collective imaginaries to emerge. In tune with the transformability of our

own bodies and voices, we seek to create modes of thinking adjusted to our lived experiences rather than adapted to logics of subjection and dispossession. Situating our research in a plane of malleable values enables us to conceptualize intellectual work and practice as a profoundly political mutualism: The work we make, makes us, as researchers but also as a social body.

We strive to inhabit research in order to acknowledge it, not only by the institution but in everyday life, holding on to its significance and its purpose on multiple grounds. That is, to redefine the objectives of the research in a broader sphere, granting a new meaning for the researcher's work as part of her own social life. A shift in the objectives may re-tune the value of the researcher's work beyond its academic framework.

Research as a network of practices needs a distinctive place where valuable listening occurs, where different sets of tools for critique and appraisal encounter each other to think further on the meaning of research in arts. This place would resist normative procedures by venturing into unexpected fields, exploring new methods whether they are in the process of writing, reading or communicating research. Places where knowledge is made/produced, whether academic or otherwise, operate in cognitive capitalism as factories without territory. They make atomization and dispersion, the condition of intellectual work, rendering social condensation almost impossible. The emphasis on research in experimental artistic structures marks a challenge to the logic of an imposed standard-framework. Relocating the doctoral research out of its established territory of origin is a direct way to question how knowledge is produced.

9

The collective unfolding of experiences, texts, concepts and case studies reduces the separation of fields of specialization and structures that hinder the free flow of knowledge between practitioners. It is a form of navigation: moving across levels, dimensions, temporalities and scales that characterize the complexity of contemporary crises. The latter must be taken into consideration in shaping the conditions of research as practice by situating it in a productive locality, or a politics of location which is enacted by a body taking-place. However, this also initiates a mode of productivity operating in distance to one's own body that leads to the necessity of re-defining the whereabouts of taking-place. In other words, the condition of being practice-based means to inhabit or rehearse a network of practices taking into account the many and various inquiries embedded in spatio-temporal architectures of research. We think it is absolutely necessary to get out of the confines and constraints of academic territories that are reaching their

limit regarding the capacity to accommodate an unfinished, or an undutiful thought: a limit that we try to stretch.

How can institutions facilitate a safe space, a space protected from precarious working conditions? Who is creating new forms for the outcomes of contemporary research practises? The vulnerability of this “new” should not be abused by any party involved, being cut down by the “known”, the “comfortable”, the “familiar”, the “measurable” of a university environment. If we agree to embark on this adventure, the role of the institutional collaborations is to ensure these conditions of vulnerability.

10

Research as a practice does not stop with the submission of the final version of a doctoral dissertation. But it continues to speak to an audience through the formats of making the research public, which is a means of doing research itself.⁶

11

What is the urgency of undertaking doctoral research?

What do we want these processes to activate?

What are the long-term consequences of doctoral research as a network of practices?

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The text *Situating Our Experiences* has been written by Nick Aikens, Denise Bertschi, Michaela Büsse, Lucas Cantori, Paola Debellis Alvarez, Doreen Mende, Camilla Paolino, Hélène Soumare, Melissa Tun Tun, and Elena Yaichnikov during various CCC PhD-Forum’s session in 2018.** The Spanish translation has been realized by Paola Debellis Alvarez. Thanks to Jamie Allen and Robert Hamlin Jackson for a collaborative review of the English version on a lovely afternoon at CCC.

* The CCC PhD-Forum is a seminar-like project for fostering research-based practices in the arts while reflecting on the conditions for doing such a research from within the institution. In a world of the 21st century witnessing political, technological, ecological and epistemological ruptures, the dreams for new knowledges across disciplines (often beside disciplines) need new, comprehensive research methodologies with the capacity to think differently. The Forum’s participants are CCC Research Affiliates and

actively contributing to shape these conditions by bringing in their experiences, unease, and needs while following their specific research projects already in the form of a PhD with a university, or while being in the process of applying for a PhD. The exchange with those, who go through the process of doing a practice-based research project at this moment, is the direct way for creating a realistic framework for a doctoral school within an art academy of Higher Education in Europe. It suggests to depart from the actual needs of those, who actually do a doctoral research, as building blocks for contributing to the future PhD-program. In other words, a practice-based research in an art academy builds on transgenerational knowledges from art educational pedagogies that rely on experimentation, lived experience, open ends and situative inhabitations. At the same time, the researcher trains and tests academic methods of writing and reasoning. Therefore, the practice-based doctoral research is a hybrid with the capacity to continuously re-shape itself according to its specific research project across practices and experiences as well as fields and institutions. Closer to a para-institutional constellation, the PhD-Forum wishes to create conditions for doing a doctoral research that is informed by the analysis of the institution itself with a group of practitioners (CCC Research Affiliates), by sharing experiences and by following one's own advanced practice elsewhere. This para-institutional condition challenges managerial grids to assess quality, outcome and impact of a practice-based research, and thus, it fosters the capacity to situate the question of value on the spatial-temporal thresholds where/when the actual researcher's needs and institutional demands meet. The *outside-inside-entanglement* is an active and necessary part of building research conditions to enable the researcher to work on her project which might not master but unsettle new knowledges that have began already before a doctoral research process with the capacity to transform otherwise beyond an academic degree. (D.M.)

** An earlier version of the text was performed by the CCC Research Affiliates during the Research Day of CCC PhD-Forum / HEAD Genève in collaboration with EPFL Lausanne on May 25, 2018 with Samuel Bianchini and Irit Rogoff as well as Nicola Braghieri, Julie Enckell Julliard, Vincent Kaufmann, Charlotte Laubard, Luca Pattaroni, and Anne-Catherine Sutermeister.

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Notes

¹ In "What are We Capable of? From Consciousness to Embodiment in Critical Thought Today," Marina Garc es proposes the concept of vulnerability as constitutive for critical thought today, building her argument on Judith Butler's analysis of vulnerability in the book *Precarious Life* (2004), see: *eipcp*, 2008, online, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0808/garces/en>. Text suggested by Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh during her presentation for the 7th Forum in December 2018.

² Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Durham and London: Duke University, 2010, 3.

³ Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language to Action," in *Sister Outsider*, 1984, pp. 40-44.

⁴ See: Stuart Hall, in: "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An interview with Stuart Hall edited by Lawrence Grossberg", *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Summer 1986), 45-60.

⁵ Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 53.

⁶ Paraphrasing Irit Rogoff from her contribution to the Research Day at the CCC PhD-Forum / HEAD Gen eve in collaboration with EPFL Lausanne on May 25, 2018.